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# Negotiating New Asian-American Masculinities: Attitudes and Gender Expectations

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**Historically, U.S. institutional practices have rendered Asian-American men as simultaneously hypermasculine and emasculated. Today, the model minority myth and asexual media representations have emphasized the feminized Asian-American male. Yet, no empirical study has examined how Asian-American men construct their own masculinities. Toward this end, this study sought to examine: (a) how college-age Asian-American and white men express their masculinities, (b) how Asian-American and white women perceive Asian-American masculinities, and (c) how Asian-American men negotiate their gender expectations. Through quantitative analysis of surveys, we found that U.S.-born and immigrant Asian men view their masculinity as distinct from white hegemonic masculinity. Unlike white men, Asian-American men did not view their masculinity in opposition to their femininity. Some Asian-American men, especially the U.S.-born, appeared to be creating a new, more flexible masculinity—one free from male dominance. U.S.-born Asian men linked their masculinity with certain caring characteristics and were the only men's group willing to do domestic tasks. Women viewed Asian-American men as hav-**

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**ing more traditional gender roles and being more nurturing, in contrast to their views of white men, which matched American norms of masculinity. Overall, these results contribute to the masculinity literature by showing how Asian-American men negotiate their contradictory positions as members of a privileged gender group and subordinate racial groups.**

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Changes in Asian-American heterosexual masculinity are of great interest within the Asian-American communities and to the general public. Historically, this racialized masculinity was both hypermasculinized and desexualized as a way to limit economic and racial opportunities in the United States (Espiritu, 1997). While these dichotomous ideas about Asian-American masculinities are still pervasive, new articulations of what it means to be male, straight, and Asian American are affecting different Asian-American communities and interpersonal relationships at home and in workplaces. Issues of Asian-American masculinities are brought up in relation to interracial dating and marriage, expectations about supporting the family and community, sexual violence within the home and sexual harassment in public spaces, racial violence stemming from economic scapegoating and white supremacist ideology, mass media portrayals of Asian-American men, and complexities about ethnic identity and politics.

The present quantitative study uses survey data to examine, from a social psychological perspective, how college-age Asian-American and white men express their masculinities and how Asian-American and white women perceive Asian-American and white masculinities.[1] This study also explores how Asian-American men conceive and negotiate their expectations about gender relations.

This study contributes to our understanding of newer expressions of racial-ethnic masculinities by focusing on contemporary youth to expand the limited theoretical literature on Asian-American masculinity and by providing empirical evidence. There has been exciting fictional and artistic expressions of Asian-American masculinities but little quantitative analysis of these issues. Furthermore, this study enhances our understanding of racial-ethnic masculinities by focusing on changes in racial and gender power relations and expectations.

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MALE MASCULINITIES

Masculinity is an important component in the social construction of gender relations (Brod, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel & Messner, 1995). Gender refers to the material and ideological relations and consequences based on social distinction made from female and male physical differences. Gender expectation refers to a normative conception of appropriate attitudes and activities for a particular racialized and gendered group. Gender embodies relations of power (Connell, 1987). This distinction functions to create and maintain unequal power relations between people of different biological sexes and results in the domination and exploitation of women as a group. It is not biology but patriarchal social institutions, interactions, and practices that limit each sex to those characteristics and activities defined as feminine and masculine. The ideas of what constitute masculin-

ity and femininity are contingent on a given society and historical moment even though individuals are capable of the full range of abilities and emotions. No innate and universal gender qualities automatically accompany physical sex differences. In contrast, some believe gender qualities are strongly related to biological sex differences. These arguments rest on notions of racial and sexual superiorities. For instance, eugenicists like Rushton (1996) argue that Asians are more intelligent and less sexual than whites, who in turn are brighter and less sexual than blacks. They link race and masculinity to genetics, which we view as faulty arguments. This study is based on the former notion that gender embodies power. Sexist attitudes and actions valorize masculinity and accord men power and privileges. But if masculinities are socially constructed by and for each generation of men growing up rather then genetically inherited, then masculinities can change, and sexism in principle can be eradicated (Segal, 1990).

While masculinity is gendered, socially constituted, and intrinsically connected to power relations, it is also differentiated in its production, reproduction, and negotiation by everyone in society at the level of both group interactions and institutional practices. Masculinity is not one way of being for men; rather it takes a variety of forms. It is different for the working class and the upper class; for heterosexuals, gay men, and bisexuals; for blacks in Panama and in South Africa; and for the young and the elderly. Male masculinities are bound up with the complex weaving of race, sexuality, class, and other social distinctions used for domination and exploitation (Baca Zinn, 1982; Franklin, 1988; Kimmel, 1987; Kurtz, this issue; Mac an Ghaill, 1990). Moreover, male masculinities also relate to the ways some men have power over other men.

For example, in the U.S., Davis (1983), hooks (1981), and Wallace (1978) show how black men and black women have been sexualized during slavery and Reconstruction periods. White men used rape as a means of controlling and terrorizing black women during slavery, and the myth of the black male rapist was created to justify the lynching of black men. These events of rape and racism resulted in the social regulation of both black masculinity and femininity. However, these sexualized and racialized images never completely took hold, because when possible black men and women fought back against these images and acts of physical violence. These active struggles for control over their sexualized bodies offered possibilities to change gender relations.

## ASIAN-AMERICAN HETEROSEXUAL MASCULINITIES

For Asian-American men, the masculinity issue is about who one is and how one relates to family and relatives, loved ones, emotional partners, close friends, and acquaintances. It is also related to the ways one presents oneself to the world at the workplace, at school, in leisure situations, and other public gatherings. It is in these ways Asian-American men reproduce and negotiate gender relations with women and other men in their lives. In this section, we discuss the historical context shaping their masculinities attending to issues of power relations. Here we focus on *heterosexual* masculinities given the scope of this study.[2]

Historically, racialized immigration policies, labor practices, and media images helped shape and regulate previous Asian-American masculinities and affect present forms of these masculinities. One set of practices involved the tension between recruitment and exclusion of Asian male laborers from 1850s to 1930s (Chan, 1991). On the

one hand, these workers were recruited as a source of cheap labor to work in plantations, canneries, mines, and agricultural fields. On the other hand, hostility, race riots, and anti-Asian sentiments created an atmosphere of racial hatred against all Asians and resulted in the passage of race-based immigration laws and exclusionary policies. Moreover, the exclusionary policies were gendered by allowing a sizable number of Asian male laborers to enter, while restricting the entrance of Asian women, thus producing highly skewed sex ratios. Further, images of Asian people as members of inferior races, depraved heathens, opium addicts, and Yellow Peril invaders perpetuated popular media during this period. Not only did these images serve to heighten hostility against Asians in the U.S. and fuel the movement for their exclusion, these images also create lasting racialized Western narratives of the East and serve as one key justification for U.S. imperialist expansion into "foreign" lands.

These policies, practices, and images shape and regulate early Asian-American masculinities in several ways (Bulosan, 1946/1973; Espiritu, 1997; Okada, 1957/1976). The dominant society made these men to be perpetual outsiders, foreigners, different. Whites saw Asian-American men as treacherous, dirty, and criminals. They were viewed as sex-starved gangs of men lusting over white women, as potential rapists, and as hypersexualized invaders ready to produce Asian children in the U.S. if given the opportunity. They needed to be constantly monitored by employers, groups of white men, and the police to keep them docile and submissive. And the lives of these Asian-American men were highly dependent on their employers. In addition to being hypersexualized, Asian-American men were simultaneously emasculated. Many did "women's work," such as laboring as domestic servants, launderers, and cooks. Some were separated from their wives living in Asia and somehow maintained split households. Other men were able to have their wives enter the country through the picture bride system. For those not married, anti-miscegenation laws forbid these men from marrying white women in most states and made the formation of new families highly difficult. Most participated in bachelor societies outside the workplace. Here laws limited Asian-American men's interactions with white communities and especially white women. Religion, gambling, and visiting prostitutes served as some leisure and communal activities in an isolating, desolate, and unfriendly place.

In short, early Asian-American masculinity was constructed to be threatening and disempowering in relations to white employers and to the larger U.S. society. In regard to women, power relations were somewhat ambivalent. Patriarchal and unequal gender relations were reinforced in most U.S. households and split households. Relationships between Asian-American men and white women involved complex power relations; Asian-American men were simultaneously in dominant and subordinate positions in relation to their white partners.

The gender, ethnic, and economic compositions of U.S. Asians have changed with the shift to a less restrictive and discriminatory immigration policy in 1965 and the entry of political and military refugees resulting from U.S. military incursions into Korea and Southeast Asia. Since 1965, the majority of Asian immigrants have been women, resulting in a more similar number of men and women (Chan, 1991). This latest wave of refugees and immigrants brought new Asian ethnic groups, such as the Hmong as well as earlier Asian groups such as Filipinos. Larger numbers of middle-class professionals, along with people from working-class backgrounds, are changing communities built by the earlier generation of farm, manual, domestic workers, and small-business owners.

Recent changes in Asian-American masculinities cannot be accounted for merely by the more balanced gender ratio. Rather we posit that contemporary changes in these masculinities are linked with fundamental transformations in social relations resulting from the entry of recent Asian Americans and the concomitant economic, political, and cultural changes in these communities. First, the model minority myth is highly gendered and economic, and forms the basis of the dominant society's construction of Asian-American maleness (Cheng, 1996; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992).[3] This myth suggests that Asians are highly self-reliant, economically successful, and politically nonresisting. This myth is built on the sexist and heterosexist notions that Asian-American families instill "proper" work and moral values with the economically responsible father as the head of household. This is in contrast to previous stereotypes of Asian-American men as single, hypersexual, and docile males. The model minority image of Asian Americans is also used to minimize the effects of racism and to blame other racial minority and immigrant groups for their location with the economic hierarchy. In this sense, Asian-American masculinity is about being a good family man who provides for his family and does not ask for government economic assistance. This pressure to be a good provider impacts differentially for a variety of Asian-American men based on economic status, acculturation level, immigration and refugee status, and ethnic identity (Cheng & Thatchenkery, 1997; Lazur & Majors, 1995; Sue, 1990).

In addition to the model minority myth, the media generally creates images of emasculated Asian-American men (Fong-Torres, 1995). The Asian-American men are not portrayed in sexual terms and are imputed with no sexual drive. They are characterized as brainy wimps, martial arts contenders, perpetual foreigners, or fatalistic, silent victims. In the rare times when they are portrayed in sexual encounters, they are usually hypersexualized as sex-starved rapists (Tajima, 1989). These portrayals simply recycle age-old stereotypes in contemporary roles through humor and horror.

In the past three decades, Asian-American heterosexual men have explored their own masculinities in search of new forms and expressions (Chan, 1998; Cheng, 1996; Chin, 1981; Fulbeck, 1990). Fictional narratives and experimental videos demonstrate some of the more public expressions of these changing masculinities. This search involves complex negotiations of certain gendered and sexualized practices rather than simply replicating dominant modes of white patriarchal heterosexual masculinity. Yet, other Asian-American men simply rely on male dominance to reclaim their neutered Asian masculinities. For example, some Asian-American men feel that their masculinity is challenged and undermined when Asian-American women date white men. This may be related to emotions of abandonment, rejection, and shame. Their perceptions of relatively high Asian female-white male unions are supported by empirical studies showing that Asian-American women marry and date whites at higher rates than do Asian-American men, a trend that has existed since the 1950s (Fujino, 1997; Kitano, Fujino & Takahashi, 1998; Shinagawa & Pang, 1996). For example in 1990 in California, 7.7 percent of Asian-American men were married to whites, compared to 16.2 percent of Asian-American women (Shinagawa & Pang, 1996). Among college students, Fujino (1997) found that 34.1 percent of Chinese-American men and 42.1 percent of Japanese-American men had dated at least one white partner, compared to 41.5 percent of Chinese-American women and 60.9 percent of Japanese-American women. While it is true that a higher percentage of Asian-American women date whites than do Asian-American men, these data

indicate that Asian-American men date white women at fairly high rates, at least in a metropolitan, multicultural setting. Given this, it is possible that Asian female-white male unions challenge Asian-American masculinities, not because Asian-American men lack female dates, but rather because white dominant society and white men have already usurped Asian-American masculinities in so many ways. Clearly, redefining, renegotiating, and reconstructing Asian-American masculinity is a complex process, which has involved both resisting male dominance and privilege as well as using patriarchy to buttress a somewhat fragile and certainly racialized masculinity.

## ABOUT ASIAN-AMERICAN MALE MASCULINITIES

Social representation theory provides a way to examine how social groups *negotiate* in constructing their attitudes. The turn to social representation theory offers a social psychological approach to studying attitude formation by examining the expressed thinking of social individuals. Because this paper focuses on attitudes about Asian-American masculinities and takes seriously people's experiences, we view their attitudes as arguments about social representations. Moscovici (1984) posits that social representations are cognitive products about ideas or objects created by a social group. Social representations are structured by and anchored in ideological systems, and have emotional valences. Social representations communicate and create knowledge, and shape and are shaped by the relationships of domination and subordination in which they are embedded (Bhavnani, 1991). By considering them as representations, Moscovici highlights the active cognitive processes in which human beings structure their social environment. Moreover, Billig (1996) points to the argumentative context of attitudes. This argumentative context is social, rather than basing attitudes simply on individual's motives and beliefs. An attitude refers to an evaluation on matters of public debate, disagreement, and discussion. "In consequence, we can expect the possessors of attitudes to justify their stances, to criticize competing views, and to argue about the issues" (p. 207). In traditional cognition analysis, the perceiver remains a lone individual, forming, apparently in isolation, her or his accounts of racial and gendered traits on the basis of the actual similarities and differences in the individual she or he meets. Here, we argue that attitudes in general, and attitudes about Asian-American masculinity, in particular, provide a way to understand the specific way gender and masculinity are socially conceived by the study's participants.

So far, we know of no quantitative study that examines how Asian-American men view their own masculinity. However regarding attitudes by others about Asian-American men, Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter and Sullivan (1994) found that among University of Houston students, Asian-American men were considered intelligent, short, achievement oriented, soft spoken, and hard workers. From an augmentative social representation perspective, this suggests that Asian-American masculinity is socially constructed around "model minority" maleness and not in terms of the dominant construction of masculinity.

Moreover, the current literature on gender attitudes reveals contradictory findings about Asian-American men's views about gender expectations and women's rights. One study found that Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant men, but not U.S.-born Asians, experienced gender-role conflicts in the areas of success, power, and competition

as well as displays of emotions. In other words, immigrant Asian men tended to embrace hegemonic masculinity (Kim, O'Neil, & Owen, 1996). Based on the *Attitudes Towards Women Scale*, one study in Hawaii found that Chinese, Japanese, and Hawaiian men hold more conservative attitudes towards women's rights and roles than white men (Ullman, Freedland, & Warmsun, 1978), while another found that Chinese-American men hold more liberal views than white men (Braun & Chao, 1978).

## METHOD

### PROCEDURE

The present study used data collected from a study on heterosexual college dating of Chinese, Japanese, and white Americans (see Fujino, 1992). The dating study recruited respondents from two sources: psychology courses and the registrar's listing of university students. Of the 319 (57 percent) from psychology courses, the majority came from introductory courses for which participation was one means to fulfill a course requirement, and a few students from upper division psychology courses participated for extra credit. To ensure an adequate number of Asians, the study also recruited 237 respondents (43 percent) from the university's listing of Chinese, Japanese, and white students. The dating study contacted these respondents randomly from the university telephone list. Participating respondents received a $5 gift certificate. Of the 405 individuals contacted by telephone and eligible to participate, 317 subjects agreed to participate, and 239 completed the questionnaire. For each ethnic gender group, a t-test analysis found no significant differences between samples, at the $p < .001$ criterion controlling for type I experimental-wide error rate, on any of the variables: age, parental socioeconomic status, parental education, and generation. So we decided to combine the two samples.

### MEASURES

Respondents completed a 45-minute questionnaire dealing with demographic information and attitudes about themselves, women, and racial-ethnic gender groups. Measures specific to the present paper were as follows.

*Demographic Information.* Respondents provided demographic information including ethnicity, sex/gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, birthplace of self and parents, and mother's and father's educational and occupational backgrounds.

*Attitudes About Self.* The study developed a list of 30 attributes to elicit ethnic and gender differences in heterosexual relationships to emphasize ethnic concerns, issues, and power relations from past studies of qualities desired in potential mates (Buss & Barnes, 1986) and of personality characteristics (Wiggins, 1979). The attributes include physical attractiveness (physical attractiveness, cute), sexual expectations (sexually exciting), personality characteristics (considerate, nurturing), and socioeconomic status (high occupational status potential). To explore respondents' attitudes of their own attributes, respondents

reported the degree to which they possess each of the 30 attributes on a five-point Likert scale from "not at all" (1) to "a lot" (5).

*Attitudes About Others.* The study presented the same list of 30 attributes to examine respondents' attitudes about Chinese, Japanese, and white members of the opposite sex. For example, women read: "Imagine that there are 100 Japanese-American men in the room. How many of these 100 men do you think possess each of the following characteristics?" Respondents indicated the number (from 0 to 100) of individuals perceived to possess each attribute. The study used to same procedure to assess the attitudes about Chinese-American and white men.

*Attitudes About Women's Roles.* The study assessed the attitudes towards the rights and roles of women with the *Attitude Towards Women Scale* (AWS; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973). The AWS short form consisted of 25 items, rated on a four-point Likert scale from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly," that tap into six theme areas: vocational, educational, and intellectual roles; freedom and independence; dating, courtship, and etiquette; drinking, swearing, and jokes; sexual behavior; and marital relations and obligations. We used the AWS because it is the most commonly used measure of attitudes toward women, used in 371 published studies, and has a high internal-consistency reliability (coefficient alpha above .80 for various populations) and high validity (Beere, 1990).

## RESPONDENTS

A total of 559 people responded to the survey questions: 55 immigrant Asian men, 90 U.S.-born Asian men, 92 white men, 67 immigrant Asian women, 96 U.S.-born Asian women, and 159 white women. The participants self-identified their ethnic background as solely Chinese, Japanese, or white/European. The study did not collect data on any other Asian-American groups, thus Asian Americans here refers to only to those of Chinese and Japanese descent (see Note 1). The dating study also excluded married or homosexual individuals to provide an appropriate sample to examine interracial dating attitudes and practices of self-identified heterosexuals. The age ranged from 16 to 35, with a mean age of 19.8 years. We determined the respondent's generation using the country of birth of subjects and their parents. Over half of the Chinese Americans were immigrants, and another 40 percent were second generation. In contrast, most whites (80 percent) were at least third generation. Among Japanese Americans, 20 percent were first generation, 37 percent second generation, and 44 percent third generation or more. Participants generally came from families with above average socioeconomic levels. The *Nam-Powers* (Miller, 1991) socioeconomic status scores (0-100), derived from median education, median income, and occupation for women and men in the civilian labor force in 1980, yielded a mean SES score of 78 for fathers and 51 for mothers. On average, fathers had graduated from college and mothers had attended some college.

## DATA REDUCTION ANALYSIS

We used principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation to determine the major factors underlying the 30 interpersonal characteristics of the *Attitudes About Self*

and *Attitudes About Others* scales. First, we performed factor analyses separately on these scales to determine the number of factors to use. The scree procedure indicated a three-factor solution. We then performed factor analyses with varimax rotation, with the number of factors set to three, to determine the underlying factor structure. We included variables with eigenvalues greater than or equal to .30 in the factor, and yielded very similar factor patterns for each scale. Two attributes (quiet and expresses her/his feelings) did not consistently load on a single factor, and so we excluded them. We combined the two attribute scales imputed to Chinese and Japanese by taking the average scores for each of the 30 attributes because they were highly comparable. Note that the data suggest that there were no effects for the order in which subjects rated the three ethnic groups. If there was an order effect, the Chinese members of the opposite gender would consistently be rated highest (or lowest), followed by whites and then Japanese in descending (or ascending) order. What the data show is that Chinese and Japanese Americans were given consistently similar ratings, both of which differed from the ratings given to whites. This suggests that the respondents indeed responded to the ethnic backgrounds listed. The three-factor solution explains 47 percent of the observed variance of the *Attitude About Others* scale.

The first factor, labeled *Attractiveness*, explains 22 percent of the observed variance for *Attitudes About Others* scale. It consists of 11 items: sexually exciting, physically affectionate, physically attractive, outgoing/sociable, romantic, good sense of humor, exotic, values equal sex roles, strong personality, easy going, and cute. It exhibits a coefficient alpha reliability of .87.

The second factor, labeled *Power*, explains 16 percent of the observed variance for *Attitudes About Others* scale. It consists of eight items: masculine, high occupational status potential, high income potential, ambitious, college graduate potential, dominant, independent, and feminine. The attribute, feminine, received a negative eigenvalue, and was thus negatively coded. This subscale, representing three aspects of power—dominance, socioeconomic status, and gender—has a coefficient alpha reliability of .88.

The third factor, labeled *Caring*, explains nine percent of the observed variance. It consists of nine items: considerate, polite, reliable, humble, obedient, sensitive to my feelings, nurturing, domestic, and traditional sex roles. It exhibits a coefficient alpha reliability of .87.

## RESULTS

### PATTERN OF ASIAN-AMERICAN MALE SELF-CONCEPT

Table 1 shows how immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white men view themselves based on the 30 personal characteristics provided to them. It lists self-ascribed characteristics that 60 percent or more of each group's respondents ranked "pretty much" (4) or "a lot" (5) on a five-point scale. The bolded characteristic indicates the response level was 80 percent or more.

Overall, the self-concept patterns for immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white men differ substantively relative to each other. Compared to immigrant and U.S.-born Asian men, only white men list that they are sexually exciting, physically attractive, outgoing

**TABLE 1.**
**CHARACTERISTICS MOST FREQUENTLY SELF-ASCRIBED BY ASIAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE MEN**

| | SELF-ASCRIBED CHARACTERISTICS | |
|---|---|---|
| Immigrant Asian men (N = 55) | U.S.-Born Asian men (N = 90) | White Men (N = 92) |
| **College graduate** | **College graduate** | **College graduate** |
| **Polite** | **Reliable** | **Reliable** |
| **Reliable** | **Polite** | **Considerate** |
| **Considerate** | **Good sense of humor** | **Ambitious** |
| **High income potential** | **Considerate** | **Good sense of humor** |
| Sensitive to feelings | **High income potential** | **Independent** |
| Ambitious | **Ambitious** | **Physically affectionate** |
| Independent | **Sensitive to feelings** | **Masculine** |
| High occupational status potential | Independent | **Polite** |
| Easygoing | Easygoing | **High income potential** |
| Good sense of humor | Nurturing | Sensitive to feelings |
| | Romantic | Easygoing |
| | High occupational status potential | Nurturing |
| | Will do domestic tasks | High occupational status potential |
| | Values equal sex roles | Romantic |
| | Physically affectionate | Strong personality |
| | Masculine | Sexually exciting |
| | Strong personality | Physically attractive |
| | | Values equal sex roles |
| | | Outgoing/sociable |
| | | Share feelings |

*Note:* A listed characteristic indicates that over 60 percent of a male group ascribed to this characteristic. Bolded characteristic indicates a greater majority, at a level of 80 percent or more, ascribed to this characteristic.

and sociable, and share feelings. More than 80 percent of white men report that they are masculine and physically affectionate, while between 60 percent and 80 percent of U.S.-born Asian men report so. Additional characteristics listed by both U.S.-born Asian and white men include nurturing, romantic, values equal sex roles, and strong personality. Only U.S.-born Asian men list that they will do domestic tasks. Immigrant Asian men construct the least distinctive self-concept: they listed the smallest number of characteristics, all of which were also common to U.S.-born Asian and white men.

TABLE 2.
CHARACTERISTICS MOST FREQUENTLY ASCRIBED TO ASIAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE MEN BY ASIAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE WOMEN

| | Characteristics Ascribed To Men | |
|---|---|---|
| | Asian American | White |
| Immigrant Asian women (N = 67) | **Values traditional sex roles**<br>**College graduate**<br>**Romantic**<br>Polite<br>Nurturing<br>Exotic<br>Dominant | **Independent**<br>**Outgoing/sociable**<br>Easygoing<br>Masculine<br>Romantic<br>Strong personality<br>Good sense of humor<br>Shares feelings<br>Ambitious |
| U.S.-Born Asian women (N = 96) | Values traditional sex roles<br>College graduate<br>Romantic<br>Polite<br>Nurturing<br>Exotic | **Outgoing/sociable**<br>**Independent**<br>Ambitious<br>Good sense of humor<br>Dominant<br>Strong personality<br>Masculine<br>Easygoing<br>High occupational status potential<br>College graduate<br>High-income potential<br>Romantic<br>Physically affectionate |
| White Women (N = 159) | **Polite**<br>**Nurturing**<br>**Exotic**<br>**Values traditional sex roles**<br>**College graduate**<br>**Romantic**<br>Introverted/quiet<br>Shares feelings<br>Values equal sex roles | **Masculine**<br>Independent<br>Outgoing/sociable<br>Dominant<br>College graduate<br>Ambitious<br>Strong personality |

*Note:* A listed characteristic indicates that the respondents consider more than 60 percent of a male group to posses a characteristic. Bolded characteristic indicates a greater majority, at a level of 80 percent or more, are considered to posses a characteristic.

All three groups have 11 characteristics in common, including college graduate, reliable, polite, good sense of humor, considerate, high-income potential, ambitious, sensitive to feelings, independent, easygoing, and high occupational status potential. Characteristics such as college graduate, high-income potential, and high occupational status potential show that these young male students knew their economic potentials because they attend a highly competitive university.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN BY ASIAN-AMERICAN AND WHITE WOMEN

Table 2 indicates how immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white women assess Asian-American and white men based on the 30 personal characteristics provided to them. The table lists the characteristics that women respondents view 60 percent or more of a general Asian or white men population to possess. The bolded characteristic indicates that respondents viewed 80 percent or more of the male group to possess the attribute.

Overall, women impute a constellation of attributes to Asian-American men that differ substantially from the characteristics describing white men. Immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white women share similarities in how they view Asian-American men. In contrast, immigrant and U.S.-born Asian women view white men slightly different than do white women.

The three groups of women view Asian-American men as valuing traditional sex roles, college graduate, romantic, polite, nurturing, and exotic, and they ranked these characteristics in a similar order. Immigrant Asian and white women view more than 80 percent of Asian-American men as valuing traditional sex roles, college graduate and romantic while U.S.-born Asian women view between 60 percent and 80 percent of Asian-American men as having these traits. Only immigrant Asian women consider Asian-American men as dominant, and only white women consider Asian-American men as introverted/quiet, share feelings, and valuing equal sex roles.

The three groups of women view white men as independent, outgoing and sociable, ambitious, and having a strong personality. Both U.S.-born Asian and white women view white men as dominant and being college graduates. Both U.S.-born and immigrant Asian women view white men as easygoing, romantic, and having a good sense of humor. Only U.S.-born Asian women view white men as high occupational status potential, high-income potential, and physically affectionate. Also, only immigrant Asian women consider white men to share feelings.

Notice that U.S.-born Asian women impute more characteristics to white men than to Asian-American men. U.S.-born Asian women impute more characteristics to Asian-American or white men than do immigrant Asian and white women.

### ASIAN-AMERICAN MALE SELF-CONCEPT OF ATTRACTIVENESS, POWER, AND CARING

Table 3 presents the mean ratings on attractiveness, power, and caring that Asian-American and white men ascribe to themselves. The attractiveness, power, and caring ratings resulted from the factor analysis of the 30 personal characteristics. The possible range of the ratings is from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest). First, white men (60.7) view themselves as more attractive than do U.S.-born Asian men (54.8), followed by immigrant Asian men (49.6). Analysis of variance indicates that these means are statistically different, $F(2,$

**TABLE 3.**
**MEAN RATING OF CHARACTERISTICS ASCRIBED TO MEN ABOUT THEMSELVES AND BY WOMEN (POSSIBLE RANGE: 0-100)**

ASCRIBED TO ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN

| | BY SELF | | BY WOMEN | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics | Immigrant Asian men (N = 55) | U.S.-Born Asian men (N = 90) | Immigrant Asian women (N = 67) | U.S.-Born Asian women (N = 96) | White Women (N = 159) |
| Attractiveness | 49.59 | 54.75 | 34.25 | 36.23 | 32.29 |
| | (15.14) | (11.74) | (10.60) | (13.08) | (11.28) |
| Power | 76.07 | 76.17 | 66.40 | 68.36 | 67.57 |
| | (11.24) | (11.90) | (10.55) | (9.88) | (11.36) |
| Caring | 56.73 | 59.67 | 47.75 | 52.22 | 51.85 |
| | (10.13) | (9.94) | (9.64) | (10.57) | (10.74) |

ASCRIBED TO WHITE MEN

| | BY SELF | BY WOMEN | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics | White Men (N = 92) | Immigrant Asian women (N = 67) | U.S.-Born Asian women (N = 96) | White Women (N = 159) |
| Attractiveness | 60.65 | 53.08 | 52.27 | 48.14 |
| | (11.12) | (12.36) | (11.15) | (10.41) |
| Power | 79.05 | 62.98 | 65.95 | 64.45 |
| | (12.49) | (9.60) | (9.75) | (10.41) |
| Caring | 56.98 | 39.74 | 44.10 | 43.66 |
| | (9.20) | (9.17) | (10.81) | (9.28) |

*Note:* Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

232) = 4.34, $p<.05$. The mean ratings of attractiveness are statistically different between white male and U.S.-born Asian men, $F(1, 232) = 10.8$, $p<.01$, between white male and immigrant Asian men, $F(1, 232) = 27.33$, $p<.01$, and between U.S.-born Asian men and immigrant Asian men, $F(1, 232) = 5.45$, $p<.05$. Second, immigrant Asian (76.1), U.S.-born Asian (76.2), and white (79.1) men view themselves similarly in term of power. Analysis of variance indicates that these means are not statistically different, $F(2, 232) = 1.66$, $p>.10$. Third, immigrant Asian (56.7), U.S.-born Asian (59.7), and white (57.0) men view themselves similarly on the caring rating. Analysis of variance indicates that these means are not statistically different, $F(2, 232) = 2.10$, $p>.10$.

### ATTITUDES ABOUT THE ATTRACTIVENESS, POWER, AND CARING OF ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN

Table 3 also presents the mean ratings on attractiveness, power, and caring ascribed to Asian-American and white men by U.S.-born and immigrant Asian and white women. Two-way analysis of variance on the mean attractiveness, power, and caring scores indicates that the main effect of rated-male groups is significant, but the main effect for woman respondents is not significant. That is, first, the three groups of women view white men as more attractive than Asian-American men, $F(1, 320) = 313.01$, $p < .01$. Second, the three groups of women view Asian-American men as more powerful than white men, $F(1, 320) = 20.78$, $p < .01$. Third, the three groups of women view Asian-American men as more caring than white men, $F(1, 320) = 132.27$, $p < .01$.

In addition, all the women, on average, impute significantly lower attractiveness, power, and caring ratings than did the men. On average, these women impute men, both Asian American and white, with an attractive score of 42.1, while the men give themselves a score of 55.8. These women impute to men a power score of 66.1, while the men impute themselves with a score of 77.3. And these women impute to men a score on caring of 47.0 while the men impute to themselves a score of 57.9.

### NEGOTIATING ASIAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITY

To explore their construction of masculinity, Table 4 shows the correlations between masculinity and self-ascribed characteristics of Asian-American and white men. The most significant finding of the correlation analysis is that both U.S.-born and immigrant Asian men show no significant association between masculinity and femininity characteristics (for U.S.-born Asian men, rho = -.183, $p>.05$; for immigrant Asian men, rho = .004, $p >.05$). However there is a strong negative association between white male masculinity and the "feminine" characteristic (rho = -0.621, $p<.01$).

Furthermore, there is a positive association between attractiveness and masculinity and between power and masculinity for all three male groups. In contrast, there exists a moderate association between caring and masculinity only for U.S.-born Asian men.

Immigrant Asian men associate masculinity with being physically attractive, physically affectionate, cute, sexually exciting, good sense of humor, and obedient (negative). U.S.-born Asian men associate masculinity with sexually exciting, outgoing/sociable, high occupational status potential, polite, and reliable. White men associate masculinity with strong personality, sexually exciting, college graduate, independent, feminine (negative), high income potential, dominant, high occupational status potential, and values traditional sex roles.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITY

Table 5 presents the mean values for attitudes about women and gender expectations by Asian and white male. The possible range of the value is from 0 (disagree strongly with liberal statements) to 3 (agree strongly with liberal statements).

Immigrant (2.03) and U.S.-born Asian men (2.05) are more conservative than white men (2.23), based on the composite AWS scale. Analysis of variance indicates that these scores are statistically different, $F(2, 234) = 9.17$, $p<.01$. Moreover, the mean score is sta-

**TABLE 4. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MASCULINITY AND OTHER SELF-ASCRIBED CHARACTERISTICS**

| Self-Ascribed Characteristics | Immigrant Asian men (N = 55) | U.S.-Born Asian men (N = 90) | White Men (N = 92) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Attractiveness** | **0.535** | **0.315** | **0.297** |
| Physically attractive | 0.488 | | |
| Physically affectionate | 0.516 | | |
| Strong personality | | | 0.398 |
| Cute | 0.408 | | |
| Sexually exciting | 0.490 | 0.276 | 0.276 |
| Good sense of humor | 0.365 | | |
| Romantic | | | |
| Values equal sex roles | | | |
| Outgoing/sociable | | 0.274 | |
| Exotic | | | |
| Easygoing | | | |
| **Power** | **0.499** | **0.568** | **0.699** |
| College graduate | | | 0.373 |
| Independent | | | 0.375 |
| Feminine | | | -0.621 |
| High income potential | | | 0.277 |
| Dominant | | | 0.340 |
| Ambitious | | | |
| High occupational status potential | | 0.384 | 0.325 |
| **Caring** | | **0.286** | |
| Values traditional sex roles | | | 0.339 |
| Polite | 0.287 | | |
| Will do domestic tasks | | | |
| Reliable | | 0.297 | |
| Obedient | -0.389 | | |
| Nurturing | | | |
| Considerate | | | |
| Humble | | | |
| Sensitive to feelings | | | |

*Notes:* All correlations shown were significant at $p<.01$. For clarity, non-significant correlations are not shown.

**TABLE 5.**
**MEAN VALUES FOR ATTITUDES ABOUT WOMEN**

| Variable | Immigrant Asian men (N = 55) | U.S.-Born Asian men (N = 90) | White Men (N = 92) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Attitudes About Women** | **2.03** | **2.05** | **2.23** |
| | **(0.33)** | **(0.31)** | **(0.33)** |
| Vocational, educational, intellectual | 2.10 | 2.08 | 2.26 |
| | (0.46) | (0.43) | (0.50) |
| Freedom and independence | 2.07 | 2.04 | 2.16 |
| | (0.59) | (0.59) | (0.65) |
| Dating, courtship, and etiquette | 2.23 | 2.13 | 2.25 |
| | (0.59) | (0.59) | (0.65) |
| Drinking, swearing, and joking | 1.46 | 1.64 | 1.85 |
| | (0.68) | (0.71) | (0.63) |
| Sexual behavior | 1.62 | 1.84 | 2.35 |
| | (0.97) | (0.98) | (0.91) |
| Marital status and obligation | 2.19 | 2.30 | 2.40 |
| | (0.46) | (0.40) | (0.44) |

*Note:* Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

tistically different between white and U.S.-born Asian men, $F(1, 234) = 13.75$, $p<.01$, and between white and immigrant Asian men, $F(1, 234) = 12.46$, $p<.01$; but there is no statistical difference between U.S.-born and immigrant Asian men, $F(1, 234) = 0.09$, $p>.10$.

This composite score pattern of the AWS scale by male groups reflects several distinct attitudes about women. The values for attitudes about vocation, education, and intellectual development of women for immigrant (2.10) and U.S.-born Asian men (2.08) are statistically lower than for white men (2.26), $F(2, 234) = 7.63$, $p<.01$. Likewise, the values for attitudes on women's drinking, swearing, and joking for immigrant (1.46) and U.S.-born Asian men (1.64) are statistically lower than for white men (1.85), $F(2, 234) = 6.02$, $p<.01$. The values for attitudes on women's sexual behavior for immigrant (1.62) and U.S.-born Asian men (1.84) are statistically lower than for white men (2.35), $F(2, 234) = 11.77$, $p<.01$. The values for attitudes on women's marital status and obligations

for immigrant (2.19) and U.S.-born Asian men (2.30) are significantly lower than the white men (2.40), $F(2, 234) = 5.20$, $p<.01$.

However, the values for attitudes about women's freedom and independence did not differ among immigrant (2.07) and U.S.-born Asian (2.04), and white men (2.16) are not statistically different, $F(2, 234) = 1.58$, $p>.10$. Likewise, the values for attitudes about women's dating, courtship, and etiquette did not differ among immigrant (2.23) and U.S.-born Asian men (2.13) and white men (2.25), $F(2, 234) = .66$, $p>.10$.

Moreover, a correlational analysis between masculinity and these attitudes toward women reveal no significant association for each male group, except for the correlation between attitudes about drinking, swearing, and joking and masculinity for U.S.-born Asian men (rho = -.283, $p<.05$).

## DISCUSSION

### STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING ASIAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITY

Asian-American men construct their masculinity in unique ways. The college-age Asian-American men in our study did this in several ways by using *strategies* to negotiate their own masculinity and gendered identities through personal and social interactions. We infer these strategies from prior results by using social representation theory and the argumentative nature of attitudes in pointing to the ways social groups negotiate attitudes. One such strategy relates to the way Asian-American men differentiate their social representation—that is, a way of conceiving, engaging, and arguing about themselves as a group—of their masculinity from that of white hegemonic masculinity. This is an interesting social representation about a racialized masculinity.

First, while there are some similarities between Asian-American and white male self-concept, there are also substantive differences (see Table 1). Most white men consider masculinity as a highly important component of who they are. This is not as so for U.S.-born Asian men and less so for immigrant Asian men in terms of how they view themselves. Only U.S.-born Asian men said that they would do domestic tasks, suggesting that these men would be more open to sharing household responsibilities, while others might not be. This is one indication of how they have a more expanded notion of masculinity and do not readily accept hegemonic masculine notions that view housework as women's work. Immigrant Asian men had the least number of characteristics as part of their self-concept profile, suggesting that there is no clear consensus among these immigrant men about their group profile. This indicates that there is a much greater variation in how they view their own masculinity that differs from U.S.-born Asian and white masculinity.

Second, unlike white men, both immigrant and U.S.-born Asian men view their masculinities not in opposition to their femininity (see Table 4). Asian-American men hold the view that maleness can contain elements of masculinity and femininity. This construction of Asian-American masculinity suggests a new formation, a more flexible masculinity. At the same time, other Asian-American men continue to construct a hegemonic masculinity. These two opposing strategies used by Asian-American men may be related to Asian-American men's contradictory position in U.S. society. As Messner (1993) argues, men with marginalized social status occupy positions of dominance and subordination simulta-

neously. Asian-American men hold male privilege at the same time they are racially subordinated. Because of their subordinated position, some Asian-American men try to counter the effeminate image of Asian-American men by emulating hegemonic masculinities, which include dominance over women. Though they can engage in patriarchy and obtain male privileges, they find that racism eventually prevents them from fully copying white hegemonic masculinity. Based on our findings, we suggest that Asian-American men today are at a critical site for redefining their masculinity, because of their own experience with subordination and because the women's movement has created the consciousness to challenge patriarchy. Men's studies scholars and activists suggest that it is time for all men to challenge hegemonic masculinities and redefine maleness (Baca Zinn, 1982; Chan, 1998; Cheng, 1996; Kimmel & Messner, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1990).

Our data suggest that Asian-American men, to some degree, are attempting to negotiate new forms of non-hegemonic masculinities. For example, U.S.-born Asian men linked their masculinity with certain caring characteristics such as being polite and obedient (Table 4), and were the only men's group willing to do domestic tasks (Table 1). These men are not effeminate; rather they view these caring attributes as part of their power and masculinity, again suggesting a more flexible construction of masculinity. This suggests that U.S.-born Asian men may relate with women differently through more caring and nurturing ways in their relationships, compared to white or immigrant Asian men. This tension in strategies is important, not because it suggests a contradiction in the results, but rather we argue that this is an important part of how these young Asian-American men negotiate their masculinity. Given a history of emasculation and desexualization of U.S.-born Asian men, these men for the most part have been able to make a masculinity that does not completely resemble white hegemonic masculinity or a model minority masculinity that uses male privilege, power, and domination in relationship with a variety of racialized and class-stratified women and men.

Third, U.S.-born Asian men in our study rely on their ability to garner economic power, in terms of high occupational status potential, to built up their masculinity (see Table 4). They do not depend generally on being independent, dominant, and non-feminine for power; rather they rely on economic power. This finding suggests that, as university students, they leverage their economic ability for power and privileges within relationships more so than white men, though the latter also view economic power as part of their masculinity. In addition, unlike white men, U.S.-born Asian men also embrace caring as part of their masculinity. This further points to their flexible masculinity. In some ways, this reflects the model minority version of masculinity; however, these men do not draw on all aspects of this stereotype to construct their own masculinity. In contrast to U.S.-born Asians, immigrant Asian men do not link their masculinity with economic power or any other forms of power. They simply see their masculinity in terms of attractiveness.

Overall, these findings suggest Asian-American men construct a social representation of their masculinity through certain strategies through a series of negotiation regarding sameness and difference in relation to the norm of white masculinity in the U.S. While seemingly contradictory in construction, these collective social representations of power, attractiveness, and caring show how these men think about themselves and their maleness and how they relate to women.

### WOMEN'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF ASIAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITIES

In contrast to the ways Asian-American men construct, negotiate, and practice their masculinity, Asian-American and white women present differing constructions of Asian-American masculinity (see Tables 2 and 3). These women make clear distinctions between Asian-American and white masculinities. They tend to see Asian-American men as more traditional in their gender roles and more nurturing, and white men as more independent, masculine, and outgoing. Immigrant Asian women more so than U.S.-born Asian women view these Asian-American men as traditional. U.S.-born Asian women do not hold views about Asian-American men that are as strong as those held by immigrant Asian and white women. This indicates that there are more variations of the views, and there is not clear consensus presented in the U.S.-born women's group.

The findings suggest two key points. First, Asian-American and white women have ambivalent views toward Asian-American masculinity. On the one hand, they view Asian-American men as having traditional gender roles, yet they also consider these men as nurturing, romantic, polite, and exotic. (Given how the data was collected, there is no way to examine the potentially different ways Asian-American and white women use terms like "exotic" to refer to Asian-American men). This ambivalent relationship for immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white women highlights some of their concerns about potential domineering actions of Asian-American men as compared to white men. Moreover, immigrant and U.S.-born Asian and white women view these Asian-American men not as masculine and physically attractive compared to white men, yet believe that they might receive more intimate types of personal relations with Asian-American men.

Second, U.S.-born Asian women do not hold strong views about Asian-American men as compared to immigrant Asian and white women. This might suggest that U.S.-born Asian women have stronger ambivalent feelings about Asian-American men and participate in more cautious relationships with them than compared to white women. U.S.-born Asian women however hold strong and more varied views about white men, while in contrast white women hold less varied views about white men. This further suggests that for U.S.-born Asian women, Asian-American masculinity is not as clearly articulated for them as compared to immigrant Asian women. In short, Asian-American and white women relate to Asian-American masculinity in a more ambivalent manner than previously expected. The women in the study do not see Asian-American masculinity in only stereotypical representations, yet they in their own personal ways engage actively in making for themselves their own views on Asian-American masculinity cautiously.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, we discuss some broad contours of Asian-American masculinity with emphasis on Asian-American men's agency and their changing construction of their masculinity and identity. Using quantitative methods, we begin to point to certain strategies used by Asian-American men and tensions in these strategies in dealing with their maleness and gender expectations as well as the ambivalent relationship women have with Asian-American masculinity. To explore these issues, detailed life histories and partici-

pant observations in a variety of locations would enhance our knowledge of the nuanced mechanics of Asian-American men's negotiations of their masculinity.

We would like to offer some cautionary warning. First, it is important to consider the historical and situational limitations of this study, which focuses on Chinese and Japanese heterosexual college-aged respondents, and not to generalize beyond its scope. Given the limitations of the data collection, we can infer little about the masculinities of more recent Asian refugees in the U.S. and nothing about how other men and women of color view Asian-American masculinity as well as how Asian-American men view other people of color. This study serves as a necessary beginning by offering future studies important issues to explore. Second, we suggest that while our results and discussion highlight economic status as key in understanding Asian-American masculinity, this might not be so for working-class or poor Asian-American men. This may lead to simply reinforcing the gendered nature of the model minority stereotype. Third, we suggest that the categories of race, ethnicity, and national origins we used are not fixed. This points to the potential conflation of ethnicity, immigrant status, and acculturation levels in this study. Moreover, we want to caution against conflating cultural differences with differences in masculinities. This simply fosters reductionist thinking without considering the nuanced ways masculinities is constituted and maintained in our lives.

In closing, we suggest that it is important to think about Asian-American masculinity as fluid and dynamic. Change is possible—not simply because this research suggests so, but because the historical record has shown that Asian masculinity has changed over time. Asian-American heterosexual men need to continue to dialogue about the kind of relations they want to have with the women and men in their lives. We all have to work through issues of power, privileges, and resistances to shape our personal, social, and workplace relationships. For some, this means finding a collective safe space to talk about these issues and deeply examining our emotions, beliefs, and actions that reproduce power inequalities. For others, it also means taking collective actions to create some change. It is our hope that this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue and collective action to redefine Asian-American masculinities in ways that value an Asian maleness that is not dependent on male and heterosexual dominance and privilege.

## NOTES

1. The term "Asian American" generally refers to a diverse group of Asians living in the United States, including Filipinos, Cambodians, and Asian Indians. However, this study's sample is limited to Chinese and Japanese. In an effort not to assume Asian-American groups would be viewed similarly, we had participants rate characteristics imputed to Chinese and Japanese men separately. It was logistically cumbersome to include even one or two more Asian groups. Caution must be exercised when generalizing to other Asian-American groups. Moreover, the term "masculinity" refers to male—and not female—versions of hegemonic masculinity.

2. Some issues addressed here are relevant to both heterosexual and homosexual males, such as sexual invisibility due to racism. Some Asian-American heterosexual and

homosexual men choose to exhibit physical and interactional hypermasculinity to oppose sexual invisibility. In contrast, some white sexual partners of gay Asian-American men consider youthful Asian-American men as exotically attractive. In this case, these Asian Americans are not sexually invisible but rather sexually objectified as objects of "Oriental" fantasies. We believe that the interconnections between gay male masculinity, economic class, and ethnicity are important topics for future research.

3. The notion of the "model minority" claims that Asian Americans have made it in U.S. society despite disadvantages. This image contrasts sharply with earlier stereotypes of Asian Americans as sneaky, manipulative, untrustworthy, manual laborers. The model minority stereotype, developed in the 1960s at the same time the black, Chicano, and Asian-American social movements were battling racism, functions to offer an assimilationist, non-resisting pathway to "success." The model minority stereotype functions to show that America is an open society, and that with enough hard work, any one can make it in the U.S. High levels of unemployment, incarceration, and poverty among African Americans, Chicanos, and Indigenous Peoples can then be explained by their own laziness and incompetence. This victim-blame explanation ignores the role systemic racism plays in creating marginalization within society as well as the hard work exerted by most working-class people.

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